



ST. JOHN'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

8948 N 1900TH AVE, GENESEO IL

815-989-2025

www.stjohnsgeneseo.org

June, 2026

From the Pastor:

“Here’s What’s Coming to America and the West Unless . . .”¹

This was written by Rev. Dr. Gregory P. Seltz (LC-MS), the executive director of the Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty. His insights and warnings are well worth reading and heeding.

By the time a society realizes it has created what I like to call “secular blasphemy laws,” it is usually too late to admit that’s what they are.

They won’t be identified that way, of course. They will arrive dressed in the language of “dignity,” “inclusion,” and “harm prevention.” They will be framed as modest legal guardrails against “dangerous speech.” But functionally, they will do what blasphemy laws have always done: punish issues of conscience, punish people for expressing beliefs that contradict the reigning moral orthodoxy of the ruling elite.

And that statement is not hypothetical. There is already a test case that is happening right now in a modern, democratic, European nation.

In Finland, Member of Parliament **Päivi Räsänen** and Lutheran Bishop Johanna Pohjola have been prosecuted for years for the crime of quoting the Bible’s teaching on sexuality and authoring a church pamphlet in 2004 defending the Christian understanding of marriage. Their ordeal should chill anyone who still believes the West is immune to ideological censorship.

More than 14,000 people signed a prayer pledge in support of Räsänen as she stood trial. The letter was delivered by **Andrew Brunson**, the American pastor once imprisoned in Turkey, on behalf of the **Family Research Council**. The letter encouraged her for “obeying God rather than man,” quoting Acts 5:29.

What was her alleged crime? A tweet criticizing her church’s participation in Pride Month. A radio appearance discussing biblical teaching.

And their crime? A pamphlet, written decades ago, explaining Christian doctrine on marriage.

The prosecutor general in Finland argued, chillingly, that “The Bible cannot overrule Finnish law,” and that calling homosexuality a “sin” can have a “harmful” effect. That statement should ring alarms far beyond Scandinavia. Because it is not merely a legal claim; it is a theological one and it is one that the State of Finland is asserting is theirs, not the Church’s, to enforce. It asserts that the state, not Scripture, is the final authority over what Christians may publicly think, believe, and say.

Her case, defended by **Alliance Defending Freedom International**, has already produced a surreal legal spectacle: courts debating which Christian beliefs are permissible to express in public. Martin Luther, in his bold “Here I stand” moment in Scripture is surely rolling in his grave.

As ADF attorney Lorcan Price put it, “This prosecution for hate speech has turned into a theological trial of what Christian beliefs can and cannot be expressed.” That is the definition of a blasphemy court and it is a secular “pietistic” one at that.

The most disturbing development came recently, when Finland’s Supreme Court, in a narrow ruling, convicted both Pohjola and Räsänen over the 2004 pamphlet for allegedly “insulting homosexuals as a group.” The court ordered the pamphlet removed from public access and destroyed. A pamphlet . . . destroyed . . . in a Western democracy . . . in 2026.

Even more astonishing: the pamphlet was written before the law by which they were convicted even existed. If that does not signal a shift from rule of law to rule of ideology, what does?

¹ <https://www.lcrlfreedom.org/blog/word-from-the-center-friday-may-1-2026>.

A remarkable editorial in **The Washington Post** called the case “a free-speech farce,” observing that if Finland can do this to a sitting legislator (and the bishop of a Bible confessing Church!), “no less notable person can feel comfortable expressing similar views in public.”

Coverage from **Fox News** highlighted another key point: Räsänen was unanimously acquitted for simply posting a Bible passage on social media. That acquittal, oddly, underscores the danger. It signals that quoting Scripture is not yet illegal, but interpreting it in a way that contradicts state-approved ideology might be.

That is how secular blasphemy laws evolve: not by banning holy books, but by criminalizing traditional interpretations of them. And here is where Americans should pay attention.

We already see the moral framework forming here in our country. The rainbow, once a symbol rooted in the biblical story of Noah as a sign of God’s covenant with humanity, has been redefined into a political and sexual practice emblem. That transformation did not happen through open debate; it happened through cultural force. Those who decline to affirm the new meaning are increasingly described not merely as wrong, but as dangerous.

In the emerging worldview, disagreement is not disagreement. It is harm. And once speech is defined as harm, law and punishment are never far behind as Finland already demonstrates. Europe is simply ahead of America on the timeline. Hate speech statutes there are now being used to prosecute theological claims. The logic is straightforward: if certain identities are sacred, then contradicting them becomes a form of desecration. That is blasphemy logic, applied to secular ideology.

You may not say what Scripture says if it contradicts these new creeds. You may not describe certain behaviors as sinful. You may not question the moral status of state-sanctioned identity categories. And you may not appeal to religious authority as justification, even if its truths can be defended physiologically, sociologically, historically, and of course, theologically.

That is precisely what Räsänen and Pohjola did. And for that, they have faced years of investigation, trial, public shaming, and now conviction.

Americans should not comfort themselves by saying, “That could never happen here.” We already have social penalties for similar speech: job loss, deplatforming, blacklisting, public denunciation. Legal penalties are simply the next logical step once the cultural groundwork is complete. Once a society decides that certain ideas are too harmful to be spoken, the only remaining question is who decides. In Finland, it is now prosecutors and judges.

In America, we still have the First Amendment. But the moral consensus that supports it is eroding. Increasingly, free speech is defended only when it protects fashionable viewpoints. Unfashionable ones are treated as regrettable loopholes in the system.

Räsänen and Pohjola’s case is a warning shot across the bow of the entire Western world: the shift from freedom of conscience to state-managed morality is not theoretical. It is operational. And in this 250th year celebration, it should make us even more bold in defending the truths of the Bible, and the “limited role of the State in our lives,” which have given America and the whole Western world, foundational truths which have birthed liberty like never before.

Take note also that these secular blasphemy laws all come wrapped in the language of compassion. No one in Finland claimed to be attacking Christianity. They claimed to be protecting people from offense and harm. That is how blasphemy laws always justify themselves. Not by saying, “You must believe this,” but by saying, “You may not say that.”

The difference is semantic. The effect is the same.

When the state can order religious literature destroyed because its doctrine conflicts with current secular ideology, you no longer live in a society of free belief. You live in a society where belief is tolerated only if it stays silent.

That is what’s coming to America and the West if we fail to recognize it in time. Not the banning of Bibles. Not the closing of churches. But the quiet criminalization of what those Bibles say and what those churches teach when it contradicts the new orthodoxy. That is the modern form of blasphemy law; it’s secular blasphemy laws of a pietistic statism. Finland has shown us the future, unless we “put our liberties to work” and stop it in its tracks.

Why we do what we do in worship²

Notes on the Liturgy #14 — The Prayer of the Church

The Apostle Paul wrote, “¹I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone — ²for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

This passage gives the spirit of what the church has intended for the General Prayer also called The Prayer of the Church. St. Paul reminds us that there are things to pray for every Sunday and every celebration: the Church both local and at large, right teaching (pure doctrine), the government, the welfare and safety of others and ourselves, those suffering, God’s blessings upon our vocations, restoration of the lapsed, conversion of unbelievers, even our enemies. Thus the Prayer of the Church is designed to, “rise above small, local, and selfish considerations” (Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*). In other words, this is a time of prayer “For the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.”

The Prayer of the Church goes beyond praying only for the sick in the congregation or local issues, as important as those are. It is a broad ranging prayer that includes the great commission goal that the Word may be preached to the strengthening of God’s people and salvation of the lost. Without careful consideration it is easy to let this prayer slip into becoming only a grocery list of parochial needs rather than breathing the spirit of Saint Paul’s words above. Thus the prayer, or at least petitions within the prayer, may be more “general” in nature, as it covers a wide range of needs.

As far as its positioning in the worship service, the Prayer is closely tied with the offering and singing of the offertory. We offer up gifts, the praise of the offertory, and our prayers, all in faithful response to the Good News (Gospel) we have heard, confident our prayers are heard for the sake of Christ Jesus.

The Prayer of the Church is not the pastor’s prayer, though he speaks it. It is the prayer of the holy priesthood of baptized believers, offering prayer as God’s priest are to do. So don’t let Satan and your sinful flesh steal this prayer from you. Don’t surrender to them by simply bowing your head and letting your mind drift. This prayer is offered to the heavenly Father through mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. It is offered for the Church at large and for our neighbors and even ourselves. Yes, it is even offered for unbelievers, especially that they would be converted and therefore eternally saved. So make the prayer your own by listening intently, praying along with the words, and speaking your response, especially the “Amen,” in bold faith!

OUTDOOR WORSHIP SCHEDULE

We are soon to begin our summer schedule for worship. Weather permitting, Sunday worship will be held in our Outdoor Worship Area the second Sundays/**rain dates**: June 14/28, July 26, and August 9/23.



OFFICE INFORMATIONS

Please call the office or Pastor when someone is ill, hospitalized, or homebound or you desire private communion.



- Please use this email to contact the office: churchoffice@stjohnsgeneseo.org
- Website address – www.stjohnsgeneseo.org
- Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/St.Johns.Geneseo/>
- All Sunday services are ‘Live’ streamed at 10am and posted to our website

A DOLLAR FOR MISSIONS

The second 2026 project for Dollars for Mission is a new lighted sign for Wittenberg Lutheran Center. \$7,000 will be collected for the cost. The cast aluminum sign will be of the Wittenberg logo and will be placed on the steeple of the building to proclaim the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit for all.

Amount to be funded: \$7,000

Project: A new lighted, cast aluminum sign for Wittenberg Lutheran Center at ISU



² These notes were originally written in 2001 by Pastor David Oberdieck and have been edited both on the site listed and furthermore by Pastor Nerud. The entire original series of articles may be found at <http://steadfastlutherans.org/liturgy>.



PRAYER GROUP (CHAIN)

All are invited to participate by either requesting prayers or praying for others. Prayer requests are sent to Pastor who then sends them out by email to those praying members. This is a blessing for everyone.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16

PRAYER REQUESTS

Our Infrequent Attendees –pray the Holy Spirit bring them to understand their need to be in regular worship in church and we as brothers and sisters in Christ would reach out to them.

Our LWML Chapter– that God would continue to bless their work.

Sunday school – pray the Holy Spirit direct and guide all students in understanding God’s love and mercy in Jesus Christ. Lead parents to diligently teach their children of Jesus.

Youth – pray the Holy Spirit provide means to work with our youth to encouraging their faithful walk with Jesus. Bless and increase their numbers.

Elderly/Homebound - pray that this congregation would continually remember our Elderly and Shut-ins and minister to their special needs.

Confirmation Students – pray that they will be eager to study, learn and grow in the teachings of the Lutheran church and their faith. May they see this is the beginning of a life lived for Jesus.



REMEMBERING THOSE IN NEED!

ST. JOHN’S FAMILY—O Lord, You are the great Physician of soul and body. We pray that You would show mercy these members of St. John’s:

Linda Aper
Paula Chapa
Joyce DeFauw
John Erdman
Betty Firch
Marcia Helke

Jessica Johnson
Rosalie Jorgensen
Linda Lundquist
Mary Jayne Nash
Aaron Raschke
Drew Schillinger

Dave Schmidt
Carolyn Werner
Carolyn Wildermuth
Denise Winchell
Marilyn Woods

Jon/Anita Clausing (missionaries in Kenya)
Jodi Martins (daughter of Gary/Darla Johns)
Loyall Talarico (niece of Mary Jo Gehn)
Ellen Bauer (grandmother of Joel Werling)
Ann Behrendt (daughter of Carolyn Wildermuth)
Chad Gehn (nephew of Brad Gehn)
Ralph Boney (uncle of Larry Hock)
Ken Mirocha (brother-in-law of Terri Hock)

Marty Cavato (cousin of Mary Jo Gehn)
Chad Gehn (nephew of Brad Gehn)
Justin Rittenhouse (grandson of John/Nancy Wickwire)
Joline Parrish (sister of Gayla Kroll)
Cindy Davenport (cousin of Terri Hock)
Jeff Schreck (cousin of Terri Hock)
Gerry Viero (aunt of David Neumann’s wife)

Please remember to call the church office if you are needing prayer. Also let us know when we can remove your name because your health has improved and you are living a regular life. We love to give thanks to God for His healing just as we send Him our requests.)

MILITARY – We pray for those serving in our military and their families:

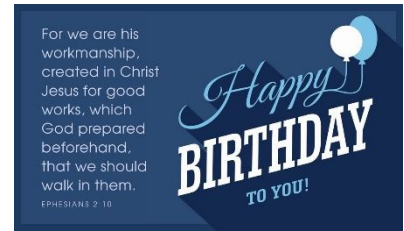
Luke Thompson (son of John/Kindra Thompson)
Karl Flynn (son of Mr/Mrs Paul Flynn)
Casey Powers Jr. (step son of Lisa Powers)
Brittany Lenni (daughter of Gabe Loenser)
Rylie Hallendorff (grand-daughter of Carolyn & Dan Werner)
Chase Werling (nephew of Joel Werling)
Carter Martwig (nephew of Joel Werling)

JUNE BIRTHDAYS

1 Jerry Hickenbottom
1 Jessica Johnson
4 Aidan Coppejans
6 Mike Kolb
7 Darla Johns
7 John Neumann
7 Kem Schillinger
8 Coni Himmelman
8 Katrina Nerud
9 Richard Anderson

12 Paula Chapa
12 Emerson Mitchell
12 Seth Winchell
13 Mandolyn Davila
16 Denise Winchell
18 Sharilyn Iliff
18 Sandra Rahn
19 Nicole Nerud
24 Haillie Scharpman
24 Rodney Miller

25 Rosalie Jorgensen
27 Kyle Rahn
28 Liz Neumann



2 Rylie Hallendorff
3 Jennifer Magerkurth
4 Daniel Werner

JUNE BAPTISMS

6 Ben Schillinger
8 Matthew Gehn
8 Linda White
10 Kyle Wickwire
12 Addison Jorgensen
14 Gannon Marckese
15 Linda Aper
16 Charles Johnson
17 Randall Rasmussen
18 Martin Himmelman

18 Janice Neeld
22 Mike Dahl
22 Lindsey Gustafson
24 Payten Helg
26 Richard Anderson
27 Gabe Loenser
28 Kyle Miller
30 Marcia Helke
30 Jacob Miller

JUNE ANNIVERSARIES

7 Gary/Darla Johns (1964) - 62 yrs
14 David/Denise Schmedt (2015)-11 yrs
15 Evan/Kate Rocheford (2019) – 7 yrs
20 Justin/Justine Mitchell (2009) - 17 yrs
22 Jay/Janelle Gibson (2014) - 12 yr
25 Bill/Julie Lage (1999) - 27 yrs
27 Mike/Francie Kolb (1970) - 56 yrs



PANCAKE DINNER

Sponsored by Cambridge Community & Youth Center

Enjoy Swedish Pancakes – Lingonberry, Blueberry, Strawberry or Plain. Biscuits & Gravy, Bacon or Sausage, and Beverages on June 6 serving 4-7pm at the Filling Station, 303 Bishop Hill St., Bishop Hill, IL. Proceeds to benefit the Cambridge Community & Youth Center activities and camp fund.



Concordia Seminary Music Series

Concert Schedule:

Tuesday, June 2

Elien Van den Broeck of Meerhout, Belgium

Tuesday, June 9

Wesley Arai of Los Angeles, Calif.

Tuesday, June 16

Jesse Ratcliffe of Warrenton, Va.

Tuesday, June 23

Alan Bowman of Dayton, Ohio

Tuesday, June 30

Elijah Buerk of Bloomington, Ind.

Hymn Festivals and Services of Sacred Music will follow the seasons of the church year and will feature locally and nationally acclaimed musicians. The concerts also are available via livestream at csl.edu/live. **7 pm. every Tuesday**

Introducing...

S.A.L.T. (Secretaries and Administrators in Lutheran Fellowship)

The Rock Island Circuit has 12 churches, 10 of which have secretaries/administrators. The secretaries have begun a new partnership in our Circuit ministry: one that supports each other in their positions by sharing ideas, problem solving together, and praying for one another. They are also working together to provide opportunities for our Circuit churches to connect through fellowship, service events, and

worship. Watch your bulletin and newsletters for upcoming events and a special fundraiser that everyone can enjoy in 2026, all...year...long.

Special screening package for \$129 for our members includes:

- Carotid Artery Disease Screening
- Atrial Fibrillation Screening
- Peripheral Artery Disease Screening
- Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Screening

Call to schedule an appointment near you! **800-324-9458** and use code: **HABC001**



We have great news! St. John's church will be hosting a Life Line Screening event on 06/25/2026. Life Line Screening is the premier provider of stroke and cardiovascular disease risk screenings since 1993. Life Line Screening is extending a discounted offer to all (St. John's) members which will identify your risk level for the following diseases:

1. Carotid Artery Disease
2. Peripheral Arterial Disease
3. Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm
4. Atrial Fibrillation

Use this link: www.lisa.social/habc or call 800-324-9458 to schedule your appointment! A simple screening can be worth a lifetime.

SAVE THE DATE!!

All Rock Island Circuit Churches are invited to attend:

- What: District Workshop, '**Exploring God's Mission Here**'.
- Where: St. John's, Geneseo – 8948 N. 1900th Ave., Geneseo IL
- When: Saturday, August 8th, 2026
- Time: Coffee and Fellowship, 8:30 AM – 9 AM
Workshop presentations, 9 AM – 3 PM
- A free lunch will be provided.
- Reservations requested by July 30th for planning purposes, by calling St. John's @ 815-989-2025 or email: churchoffice@stjohnsgeneseo.org

**Following is a note from District President Eddy: Lay attendance is essential. While all are welcome, it will be especially beneficial to have leadership and those with financial knowledge of the congregation to attend.*



Along the Way – A Guide to Prayer Walking

(Be looking for the accompanying pamphlet in your 4th Sunday bulletin)



⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.



Walk on flat surfaces if you have trouble walking.



Walk with someone.

Deuteronomy 6: 6-8

So, pick a walking route, get on the appropriate outdoor gear, head out for your walk, and pray a psalm, listen to a devotional podcast, meditate on a passage of Scripture, or download a phone app that does audible Bible readings. Pray to the rhythm of your walking or recite psalms to the pattern of your breathing (known as “breath prayer”). There are countless ways to do it — **the hardest part is simply to begin!**

Take your phone with you. Accidents can happen at all age!



Can't get out and walk? Chair or wheelchair walking can be just as good. You can sit outside, place your chair/wheelchair in front of a window or close your eyes and think about the prayer.

Start Today!

Rock Island Circuit Summer VBS Guide

Are your children, grandchildren, or young neighbors and friends looking for a fun, faith-filled experience this summer? We have several incredible Vacation Bible School (VBS) options available throughout the area!

Reserve your child's spot by calling the number listed for your chosen program. Walk-ins are always welcome.

Please note: Not all programs run 5 days, check the dates carefully.

Find the week
that works
best for you!

June 1–5

CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CHURCH

316 South Oakwood Avenue, Geneseo
9:00 AM – 11:30 AM
Rainforest Falls by Concordia Supply
PK – 8th Grade
309-944-3993

June 29 – July 3 (light meal served)

IMMANUEL LUTHERAN CHURCH

3300 24th Street, Rock Island
Light meal 5 PM, VBS 5:30 PM – 7:35 PM
Teach Us to Pray by Higher Things
309-786-3391

June 15–19

ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH – TAYLOR RIDGE

18121 134th Avenue West, Taylor Ridge
8:30 AM – 11:30 AM
Tropical Trek by CPH
309-795-1063

July 13–16 (4-Day Program)

MOUNT CALVARY LUTHERAN CHURCH

1372 West Fremont St, Galesburg
6:00 PM – 7:30 PM
Tropical Trek by CPH
309-342-7083

June 17–19 (3-Day Program)

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

109 South Elm Street, Kewanee
9:00 AM – Noon
309-852-2461

August 2 – August 6 (Includes Adult VBS!)

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

8948 N 1900th Avenue, Geneseo
Light meal 5:30 PM, VBS until 7:45 PM
Emerald Adventure: An Irish Adventure through Psalm 23
An **Adult VBS** will be held at the same time!
815-989-2025

June 22–26

ST. MATTHEW LUTHERAN CHURCH

115 12th Avenue West, Milan
9:00 AM – Noon (with a Th evening program)
Tropical Trek by CPH
309-787-4295

We can't
wait to
see you!

Bring a friend, all are welcome!



4th Annual

Spring Swing

CLA GOLF FUNDRAISER

at



9701 Illinois Highway 82, Cambridge, IL
on

June 6, 2026

\$160 for a team of 2 includes:

18 holes of golf -
scramble style

● cart rental
● 2 event shirts

lunch for 2
2 drink tickets

Check-in begins at 7:30am * Shotgun start at 8:00am



- Putting Contest
- Hole-in-One Prizes
- Raffle Drawing
- Silent Auction



Register at:

golf.geneseolutheranchurch.com



(309) 944-3993

concordia@geneseolutheranchurch.com

At Concordia Lutheran Academy we are striving to create a school filled with the love of Christ for all who we have the privilege of educating. This fundraiser will help support our mission to provide academic excellence through a classical Lutheran Education in a Christ-centered environment and develop lifelong learners, biblically sound critical thinkers, and community leaders that serve with humility, gratitude, and grace.

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" Proverbs 22:6



Rock Island Circuit Night at the Ball Park

Saturday, July 11

5:30pm Game Time
Doors open at Noon



● **RSVP** to your Home Congregation
by **Sunday, June 14th**

● **\$\$** Give your **Cash or Checks**
(written to your home congregation) by **June 14th.**

Tickets You can pick up your tickets at the
Will Call Window under our church name.

The park is wheelchair/
walker accessible.

If the game is rained out your
ticket is good for any other
home game that you want to
use it at. No money will be
refunded.





ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
 GENESEO IL
 815-989-2025

June 2026

ELDER: LARRY KANE

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4 Elders 6 pm	5	6
7 SS/Adult/Youth Bible Study 8:45am Worship/Comm 10 am	8	9 LWML 1:30 pm	10	11 Council meeting 6:30	12	13
14 SS/Adult/Youth Bible Study 8:45am Outdoor Worship 10 am	15	16 SS. Teachers 6:30 pm	17	18 Men's Bible Study 6:30 pm	19	20
21 SS/Adult/Youth Bible Study 8:45am Worship/Comm 10 am Youth 11:30 am	22	23	24	25 <i>Life Line Event @ St. John's 8am-5pm</i>	26	27
28 SS/Adult/Youth Bible Study 8:45am Worship 10 am	29 PASTOR ON	30 VACATION_____				



ST. JOHN'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
8948 N 1900 AVE
GENESEO IL 61254-8941



BUILT ON CHRIST OUR CORNERSTONE

Pastor: Rev. Timothy Nerud

pastor@stjohnsgeneseo.org

churchoffice@stjohnsgeneseo.org

Sunday school/Adult & Youth Bible Class - 8:45am

Worship Services - 10 am

(Holy Communion 1st & 3rd)

Live Streaming each week on Facebook



Happy Fathers' Day!